

## **EERF Steering Group**

**11.00am – 2.00pm, 9<sup>th</sup> February 2009**

**Hastoe Housing Association, Little Chesterford, Saffron Walden**

### **Minutes**

#### **Attendees**

Andrew Budden  
Emma Powlett  
Suzanne Harris  
Sarah Prentice  
Martin Collison

Diana Bradley (minutes)  
John Yates (Chair)  
Pat Holtom  
Graham Hedger  
Annie Hawkins

#### **Apologies**

Kate Belinis  
Francis Bedding  
Sally Williams

Sarah Hughes  
Kirsten Bennett  
John Mullen

#### **1. Welcome**

The Chair welcomed everybody to the meeting and introduced Annie Hawkins, who was standing in for Kate Belinis, to the Steering Group.

Andrew Budden reminded the Steering Group that this was his last meeting as he will be unable to attend the 4<sup>th</sup> March Annual Conference and 18<sup>th</sup> March Rural Forum/AGM meeting.

The Steering Group thanked Andrew for his significant contribution over a number of years and wished him well for the future.

#### **2. Minutes and matters arising from last meeting**

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting and the actions from the previous meeting have been completed.

#### **3. Position Papers**

The Inward Investment Position Paper needs to be circulated, with a covering letter and additional notes produced by John Yates, to the Ministers and the Forum.

The Learning and Skills Paper is being updated by Martin Collison.

The Social Inclusion Paper following the 12<sup>th</sup> December Rural Forum meeting is being drafted.

**ACTION:** John Yates to produce an Inward Investment paper covering letter and additional notes and forward these to the secretariat.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to circulate Inward Investment paper with covering letter and notes to ministers, partners and the Rural Forum.

**ACTION:** Martin Collison to complete the update of the Learning and Skills paper and forward to the secretariat.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to circulate updated Learning and Skills paper together with a covering letter to ministers, partners and the Rural Forum.

Martin suggested a Regional Rural Overview and/or Vision Statement could be created by pulling out key points from each position paper and presenting this to EEDA and other key partners and posted on the website.

**ACTION:** John and Vice Chairs to put together a Vision Statement document which will form part of the Chair's report to the AGM on 18<sup>th</sup> March.

#### **4. Future of the Forum – update**

##### a. GO-East Position

Due to restructuring within GO-East Sarah Prentice and Diana Bradley will no longer be providing support to the EERF from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009. Mick Carr will be the GO-East representative on the Steering Group from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 and his role will be to provide input in specific areas rather than to provide support.

##### b. Funding & budget

- The Rural Forum has a budget of £25,000 for 2009/10.
- EEDA may offer some facilities for meetings of interest to them e.g. EEDA paid for lunch at the joint Rural Forum/RDPE meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> December.
- Funds from other sources are being pursued but the Chair would prefer the Rural Forum to remain independent from sponsorship as much as possible.
- John Yates has agreed to be Chair of Chairs only if assistance for this role is available. Options for provision of this support are being explored.
- Pat Holtom noted the County Forums are not functioning properly due to funding issues.
- The money for County Forums cascades down from the National ACRE to the Rural Community Councils.
- Martin Collison suggested that money could potentially be found from the Sub National Review. Job losses in urban areas are the main focus but there are major job losses in rural areas. Food processing had lost 4% of its workforce. A strong voice supporting rural businesses is needed more than ever.

##### c. Strategies – Communications and Strategic

The Communications Strategy and Strategic Plan 2009/10 have been circulated to the Rural Forum.

Emma has updated the EERF website and asked the Steering Group for final comments so that the new website can be launched as soon as possible.

**ACTION:** Steering Group to forward comments on the new website to Emma.

##### d. Membership

Rural Forum membership is usually reviewed annually by writing to members nominating bodies. Do we need a different approach?

Does the forum need more rural business and economy members?

Business contacts may feel outnumbered by rural, local authority and public sector representatives and that rural is not their main priority. They would not necessarily be expected to attend Rural Forum meetings but could be part of an e-group and contribute feedback on relevant issues.

Andrew Budden will be leaving the Rural Forum from 31<sup>st</sup> March. He has approached Wil Gibson of Suffolk ACRE to nominate a replacement.

Suggestions for new members include:

- LEADER Groups: 6 in the region but one person could represent all.
- Business Link – Edwin Jones
- SREPs
- Culture and Leisure Association representative
- Tourism representative – Keith Brown Chief Executive, East of England Tourism
- Economic Reps from Suffolk, Norfolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire County Councils e.g. Ed Gregory
- National Trust
- Arts Council

These new contacts could be invited to the AGM meeting.

Martin suggested approaching East of England Business Group and asking them to have a meeting on the rural economy to which the Rural Forum could contribute and be involved in setting up.

Other regional bodies such as those involved with youth and older people to be added to the rural forum meetings circulation list for information.

**ACTION:** Steering Group to send suggestions for new members to Emma by 16 February.

**ACTION:** Emma will circulate a draft list of new members to the Steering Group for final approval.

**ACTION:** Emma to draft a letter on behalf of the Chair to the new members and invite them to the 18<sup>th</sup> March AGM meeting.

The Rural Forum has a list of members and an 'Officers' Group. The Officers Group contains partner contacts from regional public sector organisations, some of whom attend the Rural Forum meetings but not all.

In order to refresh the membership of the Rural Forum, Emma will write to the officers group and inform them that they are now members and key contributors to the Rural Forum. The officers group will be added to the circulation list of the Steering Group and informed that they will be welcome to the Steering Group meetings.

**ACTION:** Emma to draft a letter for John Yates to forward to the Officer Group contacts informing them of the new arrangements.

#### f. National Position

Huw Irranca-Davies is very supportive of the regional rural forums.

Hilary Benn has pledged government support for rural communities and businesses. Martin Collison welcomed this pledge but was concerned that it came from a Defra minister and not a BERR minister.

The next Ministers meeting will be held on 26<sup>th</sup> February. John Yates will raise concerns about funding for the Rural Forum at this meeting.

The main subjects of the next meeting will be IT and broadband access and the recession. Suzanne has an Essex RCC study on IT issues that she could forward to John before the Ministers meeting. Martin Collison has some notes available on issues relating to IT in rural areas. Nicola Lloyd has also contacted several newspapers on this issue.

**ACTION:** Emma to circulate Hilary Benn's note on support for rural communities and businesses to the Rural Forum.

**ACTION:** Suzanne to forward Essex RCC study on IT issues to John.

**ACTION:** Martin to forward IT notes to John before the 26<sup>th</sup> February meeting.

## 5. Action Plan – to complete

Emma asked the Steering Group for further comments on the topics for the next Forum meetings.

10<sup>th</sup> June – Access

- Access to green areas and services e.g. transport and shops. This issue could relate to the social inclusion and growth agenda.
- Jasmine Joolia to be approached to expand on the survey results she presented at the 12<sup>th</sup> December meeting.
- What size of population is needed to support services? This can vary from county to county. Holly Yates, Defra or CRC may have this data.
- Environment: Coastal Initiative/Ecosystems relating to green areas and access.

16<sup>th</sup> September – Health

- There is a concern that many older people are moving to rural areas after retirement and this has an impact on health and social care provision.
- Issues: physical and mental illness.
- The role of the voluntary sector: Often older people are actively involved in the voluntary sector. This may change due to the recession.
- LINKS Partnership: being piloted in the eastern region.

9<sup>th</sup> December – Follow up to the annual conference.

- This topic will be expanded following the annual conference.

17<sup>th</sup> March – Rural development, LEADER approach, RDPE Mid Term Review.

**ACTION:** Emma to update the Action Plan and circulate to the Steering Group for further comments and post the completed document on the new EERF website

## 6. Annual Conference Update

### a. Agenda- speakers

The agenda is nearly finalised. The keynote speaker is Peter Couchman, CEO of Plunkett Foundation. All the speakers are in place except Ron King, Federation of Small Businesses.

**ACTION:** John to speak to Ron King and confirm attendance.

b. Delegates

There are currently 69 delegates excluding speakers. Suzanne and Emma are to look at the delegates list to see if any key partners or organisations are missing.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to send the current list of delegates to Suzanne and Emma for checking.

c. Outcomes

The Q and A Session before lunch will just be the speakers and Chair. Some people in the audience may be primed to ask key questions. Alternatively as time for questions is short an opportunity to ask further questions on flipcharts will be offered at lunchtime.

The breakout session in the afternoon will have one facilitator and use flipcharts for each theme for delegates to fill in. e.g. business, environment, tourism.

d. Roles of Forum

Emma will brief the County Forums on their presentations as they have 10 minutes each apart from Essex who has 20 minutes. The presentation will focus on what the situation is now, what is currently happening to address issues and what will happen in the future?

e. Logistics

The annual conference is being held in a village hall. The caretaker will open the hall from 8.00am and will help with the PA system/IT equipment but chairs and tables will need to be set out. Graham, Suzanne, Kirsty, John, Emma and Sarah offered to help set up the room. Delegates will be asked to put away chairs and tables at the end of the meeting.

Emma is collecting biographies for the speakers.

Refreshments and a hot lunch will be ordered for the day.

f. Publicity

COI will charge us for a press notice about the annual conference. The secretariat was trying to get around this. Graham offered to send out a notice via the diocese.

**ACTION:** Graham to speak to Diocese Director of Communications about sending out a Press Notice for the Annual Conference.

## **7. 18<sup>th</sup> March Rural Forum & AGM meeting**

The theme of the next Rural Forum meeting is Food security. Emma has finalised and sent the agenda to the Rural Forum. John welcomed the fact that Emma had secured a speaker from Tesco.

Following lunch will be the AGM

- John will review the past year and give an outline of the Vision Statement.
- John stated that he would be happy to stand for re-election as Chair again.
- Pat stated that she would be happy to stand for re-election as Vice Chair.
- Andrew Budden is retiring as Vice Chair from 31<sup>st</sup> March.
- Suzanne Harris is happy to stand for election for the second Vice Chair post.

The next Steering Group will follow the AGM meeting.

**9. AOB**

None requested.

**Date of next meeting**

18<sup>th</sup> March 2009 at the Salings Millennium Hall, Great Saling, Braintree, Essex, CM7 5DW

Diana Bradley  
Secretariat  
11th February 2009